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Orientals

THE HINDUS IN AMERICA

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G. W. HINMAN 1869
Secretary



American Missionary Association
287 Fourth Avenue, New York

The Hindus in America

By Secretary G. W. Hinman



ARRIVING AND ARRIVED

Two hundred Hindus arriving. One three months in America.

There are now in the United States something over five thousand Hindus, or East Indians, as they are properly called, and four thousand more in British Columbia. Five thousand arrived there in a little over two years before the end of 1908. After that their entry was almost absolutely stopped, and many began moving southward into the Pacific Coast states, seeking milder climate and more favorable treatment. Most of those in the United States are now in the central and southern interior valleys of California, engaged as laborers in the sugar beet fields, or fruit ranches, or in other agricultural work. Up to the end of 1913, 6,577 had been admitted to the United States and more than a thousand had departed permanently, besides many more who expected to return. Almost all in the United States were admitted during the years 1907-11, after which rigorous application of the immigration laws debarred all but a comparatively few. In 1911 twice as many were debarred as admitted, most frequently on account of "liability to become a public charge." A little more than half of those admitted are illiterate, and the number who speak English is small. Less than one per cent. are women.

Most of the East Indians are farm laborers, between the ages of fourteen and forty-five, and come from the great agricultural plains of the Punjab in Northern India, from the district around the famous city of Lahore. A few have been in the British army in India, where the Punjab regiments are the bravest and most loyal of the Indian troops. Ninety per cent. are Sikhs, i.e., "disciples," a religious as well as racial designation applied to the members of a religious community founded in the 15th century as a protest against Indian superstition, and developed in moral



HINDUS IN LOS ANGELES, CAL.

and political strength and influence by years of persecution under the Mohammedan rulers of the Mogul Empire. These Sikhs are industrious, law-abiding, patient, with ideals of democracy and brotherhood taught by their religion such that they might easily fit into an American democracy and a Christian brotherhood which offered them a welcome.

They are not to be confused with the natives of Southern India, whose cruel and licentious religious rites and debasing social customs have formed the current conception of the native of India, nor with the mystical teachers of Yoga philosophy, who fatten on the credulity of Americans, as do the thousands of begging fakirs on the superstition of the multitudes of India. The

Sikh by tradition and practice is the husband of one wife and she is not a child wife. Woman is not looked down upon as among other Indian races. The Sikhs believe in one God. They reject caste and the elaborate and degrading rituals of other Hindu religions. They are the Protestants of India.

A strong prejudice against the Hindus has developed very generally in British Columbia and the Pacific Coast states, due to their strange appearance and customs, and to the fact that they travel so widely in search of temporary employment. The same number of other immigrants, if settled in compact industrial or agricultural communities, as in the Eastern states, would hardly excite notice, no matter how different might be their language and habits of life. The feeling against the Hindus is probably less than the anti-Chinese feeling on the Pacific Coast thirty or forty years ago. They seem less efficient and adaptable than the Chinese and Japanese, but the absence of family life and of settled and permanent employment account in large measure for their low economic condition.

Worse than the prejudice against them is the indifference of the Christian people of the Pacific Coast to their claim for sympathy and help. As early as 1900 it was found that some of these East Indian strangers, unknown and unwelcomed by the American churches, were really Christian brothers. Five of them in Berkeley, Cal., read their Hindu Bible and had prayer every night. In 1911 and 1912, Rev. J. B. Thomas, a missionary from the Punjab, visited many Hindu camps in the service of the American Bible Society. When he called a greeting in Hindustani to some laborers in a field, one ran to meet him, shouting

to his employer, "My brother has come!" During 1911, a few Hindus were taught by ladies in Claremont, Cal. In 1912, a Sunday school of Hindus was gathered there; 75 were present and heard the Gospel in their own language; 20



or 30 came regularly and were taught English and given religious instruction by a number of volunteer teachers, under the leadership of a Congregational missionary from China, Rev. C. R. Hager, who has also been actively co-operating with the American Missionary Association in work for the Chinese in America. A few of the Hindus have become Christians or were converted in India. Many Gospels in their language have been distributed by the American Bible Society, whose secretary in San Francisco, himself a returned missionary, has made the care of these neglected people his special interest. Several have come to him or written, asking for Bibles. But the lack of continuous, systematic religious work has made it difficult to secure definite results which can be reported.

Up to the summer of 1913, there was no other organized Christian work done for these people. Then a Christian Hindu student was employed by the American Missionary Association, the American Bible Society and the missionary boards of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, to travel widely among the Hindu camps and make a survey of social and moral conditions and the opportunities for religious work. He found that there was an appalling degeneracy from the relatively high moral



FIRST HINDU SUNDAY SCHOOL

standards maintained by the Sikhs in the Punjab. The Hindus drank freely and patronized houses of prostitution, though frequently they were compelled to pose as Mexicans in order to gain admission to these places and the saloons. Giving up their distinctive turban,

and with it many of the practices and prohibitions of their religion, in order to avoid the bitter prejudice of Americans, they gave up also the moral restraints which religion had previously exercised upon them, and were sinking rapidly into a degraded and dependent condition. When the small amount of their earn-

ings saved for their own use (besides what they send back to India) is squandered in American saloons and brothels, it very often happens that they are reduced to extreme poverty and become desperate in seeking employment during the winter months when their labor is not in demand. In spite of the great distress occasioned by these periods of unemployment, no one has charged them with crimes against the property or persons of Americans. They are not made enemies to society by the brutality or indifference with which they are treated, but become their own worst enemies and destroy their own chances of winning a place among Americans.

The United India Association publishes a Hindu paper at Victoria, B. C., edited by its secretary, Dr. Sunder Singh. Another organization of Hindus has headquarters at Stockton, Cal. There are said to be centers of worship for the Sikhs at several points in the Pacific states, in connection with which educational work is carried on and a society to care for the sick and for mutual help. Often, however, the poor Hindu laborers, instead of being helped by the more intelligent of their countrymen in America, are exploited by Indian students in our universities, who spend much of their time inciting sedition against the British government in India and collect money to maintain their own life of comfort and their propaganda of discontent. The Hindu temple in San Francisco, instead of being a religious center for the immigrants from India, is not open to Hindu laborers at all. The Swamis do not attempt to help their fellow countrymen.



A HINDU FOREMAN

Seven years in university.

While immigration officers, government commissions and labor unions have given much attention to the so-called "Hindu invasion," Christian churches have generally ignored their obligation in the matter. If half the energy expended in warning the country against a Hindu invasion and in framing laws to prevent it had been used in brotherly kindness toward the few who are here in America, it would not now be necessary to make a special plea to American Christians for unprejudiced judgment and a generous support of the mission work which the American Missionary Association is undertaking for these people. Every Hindu in the United States might easily be reached by strong Christian influences if Sunday schools for them were established by American churches in the regions where they are employed. Every one of them is accessible, keenly appreciative of Christian sympathy, anxious to allay prejudice by learning our language and customs, prepared by training for a religion of fatherhood and brotherhood.

To meet this and similar opportunities for missionary work among "*all nations*," now possible without leaving our own homes and churches, there must be a great new flaming up of the missionary spirit in the heart of every Christian. "Go ye" comes before "Give ye," and the present situation of missionary work for foreign-speaking peoples in the United States, Europeans or Asiatics, can only be met by a new Volunteer Movement of Christian workers in all our churches.

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